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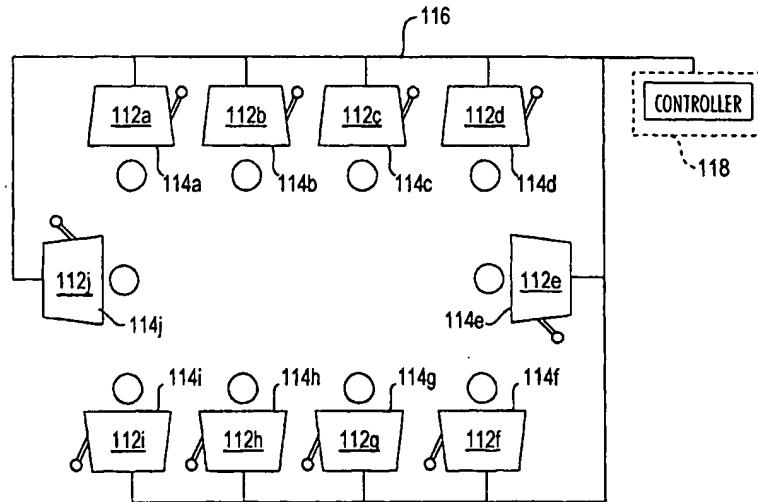
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(54) Title: BONUSING APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR GAMING SYSTEM PROVIDING FLEXIBILITY AND INTEREST



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(57) Abstract: Gaming terminals (112a-112j) or systems with bonus prize or other prize features increasing user interest or entertainment are provided. In one aspect, a plurality of gaming terminals (112a-112j) have their displays or other inputs coordinated with one another preferably to provide an impression of linked operation, particularly to provide an impression of increased likelihood of bonus or other prize award. In one embodiment, a bonus prize or feature involves movement among an ordered plurality of positions or stages (328a-328p) without needing to forfeit all bonus prizes in the event of a non-bonus-symbol outcome in a main game. In one aspect, a plurality of bonus items (518a-518p) are provided with a user being able to select only among a subgroup of the plurality of bonus items (518a-518b) at any one time.

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BONUSING APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR GAMING SYSTEM PROVIDING FLEXIBILITY AND INTEREST

Cross-reference is made to Application Serial No. _____, Attorney File
5 No. 14491 entitled "Imaging Matching Game Method", filed on Sept. 13, 1999 and
incorporated by reference.

The present invention relates to an electronic gaming terminal apparatus and
method and in particular to a gaming terminal which includes a bonus and/or attract
system configured to increase the interest and/or entertainment value of the game for
10 users.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Players of electronic gaming terminals typically have a wide variety of options
available. For example, in a casino setting, there are typically hundreds of different
15 games available to players at various gaming terminals. Casinos and other game
operators are advantageously provided with systems which initially attract players quickly
to gaming terminal and/or encourage players to continue playing at a gaming terminal.
Such features not only are believed to enhance the overall entertainment of players during
20 a trip to the casino (e.g. by maximizing the amount of time spent playing games) but also
to enhance casino revenues by decreasing the percentage of time that various terminals
may be idle. Accordingly, it would be useful to provide effective systems to assist in
attracting and/or retaining players at gaming terminals, preferably in a manner which is
relatively inexpensive to design, fabricate, implement and maintain.

Various approaches may be used for attracting players to terminals. In some
25 cases, gaming terminals provide visual (including video) and/or audio or other sound
input which attract interest or attention. It is believed that at least some players are
attracted by a perception that a gaming terminal, not currently being played, has a
relatively high likelihood of providing a prize. Accordingly, it would be useful to
provide a system which can both provide an attractive audio or video display and provide
30 an impression or perception of an increased likelihood of winning a prize, but preferably
without substantially increasing the cost of operating such terminals or systems.

Some gaming terminals include both a main game (which is the game initially
played in response to input of a game wager) and a bonus feature (which is different from
the main game). A number of different bonus features are possible, some bonus features

providing a monetary or other prize output and some bonus features including an audio or video display or output. Some bonus features are substantially single-event features, i.e., in response to entry of a bonus mode, the player receives a bonus prize and, thereupon, the bonus feature is terminated. It is believed that many single-event bonus 5 features provide less player interest and entertainment than is potentially available and accordingly it would be useful to provide bonusing features which include multiple steps or events before the bonus feature is terminated.

In one game, a bonus is achieved only after progressing sequentially through a series of stages or positions to a final bonus position, with progression continuing only 10 as long as sequential outcomes of the main game include a predefined bonus symbol or outcome (i.e., such that any game outcome lacking the bonus symbol, before the bonus is achieved, resets the bonus system to the initial stage or position in the bonus arrangement). It is believed that such a system may, at least for some players, provide less than optimal interest or entertainment value and accordingly it would be useful to 15 provide a system in which the award of a bonus prize does not require an unbroken sequential series of main game outcomes containing the bonus symbol or bonus outcome completely until the final and ultimate bonus award stage is reached.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to one aspect of the invention, player interest is enhanced by a system 20 which provides an attract or other display which is coordinated among two or more different gaming terminals. For example, an arrangement of a plurality of, preferably commonly-themed, gaming terminals (e.g., racing car theme terminals) can be configured to coordinate displays so as to simulate the display of a racing car moving from terminal to terminal, apparently racing around a ring of terminals, or the like. Preferably, the attract display is also coordinated with a prize to be provided by one of the terminals in 25 the group, e.g., providing a perception that the attract display is indicative of an enhanced probability of the prize award among the group of terminals participating in the display.

In one aspect, the bonus feature involves progressing through a sequential plurality of stages or positions on a display with at least an ultimate position being 30 associated with a (preferably relatively large) bonus prize. In one embodiment, additional

prizes amounts are associated with one or more intermediate positions. In one embodiment, any accumulated bonus amounts are awarded at the termination of the bonus feature regardless of whether the ultimate stage or position has been reached. In one embodiment, the bonus feature is terminated by the occurrence of a specific termination or "bust" symbol, e.g., in the main game or in the bonus feature. In one embodiment, the lack of the appearance of a bonus symbol in the main game does not result in termination or re-setting of the bonus feature.

In one aspect, the bonus feature defines a plurality of selectable items or positions which are collected in two or more groups (such as two or more rows or other arrangements of selectable items) such that selection of an item associated with a "next group" or "next row" symbol must be selected for the player to be able to select among items in a different group. In one embodiment, at the termination of a bonus feature, the items or stages in the bonus feature are repositioned or reconfigured so that the arrangement of each bonus feature is different from previous bonus features.

In one aspect gaming terminals or systems with bonus prize or other prize features increasing user interest or entertainment are provided. In one aspect, a plurality of gaming terminals have their displays or other inputs coordinated with one another preferably to provide an impression of linked operation, particularly to provide an impression of increased likelihood of bonus or other prize award. In one embodiment, a bonus prize or feature involves movement among an ordered plurality of positions or stages without needing to forfeit all bonus prizes in the event of a non-bonus-symbol outcome in a main game. In one aspect, a plurality of bonus items are provided with a user being able to select only among a subgroup of the plurality of bonus items at any one time.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a block diagram, indicative of a top plan view of a group of gaming terminals useable in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 2 is a flow chart depicting a process useable in connection with a group of gaming terminals including as illustrated in Fig. 1, according to an embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 3 is a front elevational view of a gaming terminal including a bonus display according to an embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 4 is a flow chart of a process that can be used in accordance with a bonus feature according to an embodiment of the present invention;

5 Fig. 5 is a front elevational view of a display showing aspects of a bonus feature according to an embodiment of the present invention; and

Fig. 6 is a flow chart depicting steps in a bonus feature of the game according to one embodiment of the present invention.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

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According to one embodiment, an attract display is coordinated among a plurality of different gaming terminals. Preferably, the attract display is coordinated among gaming terminals which are positioned in a known or predetermined arrangement, preferably substantially near or adjacent one another. In the embodiment of Fig. 1, ten gaming terminals 112a-112j are arranged in an elongated rectangular fashion with the screens facing inward. Numerous other arrangements can be used such as arrangements with the screens facing outward, u-shaped arrangements, circular or oval arrangements, polygon-shaped arrangements and the like. Preferably the attract display shown in the various screens 114a-j of the terminals 112a-j are spatially and/or temporally coordinated, e.g., to, at selected times, provide viewers with the impression that the gaming terminals 112a-j are linked to one another. In one embodiment, an image (which may, if desired, be an image related to a common theme or feature of the gaming terminals 112a-j) is displayed sequentially on one screen after another in the group, e.g., to give the general impression of the image moving sequentially from one terminal to the other 112a through 112j. For example, the system can be configured to display the image of a race car on the screen 114a of the first terminal 112a initially (preferably in such fashion as to appear to move towards the second terminal 112b) and then to be removed from the screen of the first terminal 112a and appear on the screen 114b of the second terminal 112b (preferably in a fashion appearing to move towards third terminal 112c). By repeating this process sequentially for the various terminals 112a through 112j, the attract display can be

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configured to have the appearance of the race car or other image moving, in order, around the terminals 112a-112j in the group. As another example, some or all of the displays in the group can be controlled to flash or provide a predetermined display simultaneously. Simultaneous displays and/or patterns of displays can be provided on all gaming 5 terminals of a group or on only some terminals. For example the system can be configured such that a first predetermined portion (e.g. half) of the gaming terminals output a first display and the remaining terminals (simultaneously with the first display or sequentially) output a second, different display. Such attract displays, especially when provided with appropriate accompanying audio output, is believed to not only attract 10 attention and excitement regarding the group of terminals 112a-112j, but to also leave the impression that the terminals 112a-112j are electronically linked together.

Preferably, the attract display is coordinated with an award of a bonus or other prize, e.g., in a fashion to provide potential players with the impression or perception that, following the attract display, the terminals in the group 112a-112j have an enhanced 15 probability of being terminals which will output a bonus or other prize. For example, in one embodiment the attract display is not initiated until it is known that at least one of the terminals 112a-112j in the group is about to output a bonus or other prize. Preferably, the attract display will end with a particularly impressive portion of the attract display conducted at the terminal which will output the bonus or other prize, thus potentially giving the impression that the attract display was the cause or the precursor for the award 20 of the bonus at one of the terminals 112a-112j of the group. However, since the prize which is awarded will be a prize that has already been determined for awarding (based on normal play of a game at one of the terminals), there is no additional prize cost or other operating cost (i.e., no cost in addition to the normal prize or operating costs 25 associated with normal play of any individual terminal in the group). In this way, it is possible to provide potential players with an impression that the terminals in the group 112a-j may have an enhanced probability of outputting a bonus or other prize (and thus attracting players to use the gaming terminals in the group) but without having to incur additional expenses associated with providing additional prizes (i.e., prizes other than 30 would be normally awarded from normal play on any individual terminals in the group). Furthermore, it is possible to provide a variety of gaming terminals that are configured

to provide such coordinated display near one another and to achieve the coordinated display without regard to the theme and/or configuration of the individual gaming terminals that make up the group.

In one embodiment, the attract display is configured to be initiated in a fashion such that it may not be readily apparent that the prize which occurs at the end of the display had already been won or earned as a result of ordinary play of the game. This can be achieved in a number of fashions. In one fashion, the gaming terminal may be configured with one or more bonus prizes or awards which are awarded in consequence of a gaming outcome which is not displayed to the player. For example, in the context 5 of a slot machine gaming terminal, which may have a plurality of symbols of any one kind on the slot machine reels (e.g., may have a plurality of, for example, lemon symbols), the terminal can be configured such that one particular lemon symbol is designated, in the pay table, as associated with a bonus or other prize but in such a fashion that such lemon symbol, as displayed to the user, is indistinguishable from other 10 lemon symbols. In this way, a player may win a bonus prize during normal play of the game when the designated "special" lemon symbol appears on a payline but the player would normally not perceive this result as being any different from a result with a different (nonspecial) lemon symbol appearing on the payline (and which would not 15 result in a bonus prize award). If desired some or all gaming terminals in a group can be provided with multiple "special" outcome symbols (i.e. symbols which initiate or affect 20 the bonus game and/or coordinated display). If desired different ones of the special symbols can be associated with different bonuses and/or different coordinated displays.

In another fashion, the gaming terminal may be provided with a plurality of 25 different bonus or other prizes but with only some instances of a bonus prize (preferably randomly selected instances) acting to trigger an attract display as described herein.

In another fashion, the attract display is configured such that the terminal on which the attract display is initiated can be different from the terminal which eventually receives a bonus or other award, potentially giving the appearance that there is no causal 30 connection between the winning of a bonus or other prize and the initiation of an attract display.

Accordingly, when a system is configured using some or all of the above-described techniques, it will appear, to players and potential players, that the group of terminals 112a-112j provide a linked or coordinated display at random times, beginning and ending at random terminals in the group, and with the ending terminal receiving the 5 award of a prize, apparently unrelated to events of normal game playing at the terminal. However, this type of attract display, although believed particularly effective in achieving the interest and participation of potential players, can be configured to occur substantially without additional prize costs.

In order to coordinate the display as described above, the terminal 112a-112j are 10 coupled via a communication link 116. In the embodiment depicted in Fig. 1, the terminals in the group 112a-112j are coupled to a separate controller device 118 which can be a computer, communicating with the terminals, e.g. via a local area network (LAN) or other link. Although Fig. 1 depicts a backbone communication architecture, other architectures can be used including a daisy chain architecture, a hub and spoke 15 architecture and the like. It is possible to configure a system in which, rather than providing coordination using a separate controller device 118, one or more of the terminals 112a-j may perform the control functions. For example, in one configuration, in order to initiate the display, one of the terminals (which may be the terminal in which a payment or prize is to be awarded) will send a communication to the remaining 20 terminals in the group indicating that the first terminal will act as a master terminal, whereupon the remaining terminals in the group will operate in a slave fashion with regard to the display. Preferably, such a system is configured such that, if the master terminal becomes disconnected or otherwise cannot properly operate as the master terminal, another terminal (e.g., with a next-lower or next-higher identification number 25 within the group, or the like) will automatically assume the master controller role. It is also possible for the winning machine to temporarily become the master controller to coordinate display, and thus providing a "floating" master controller.

As depicted in Fig. 2, according to one embodiment, the procedure for providing an attract display can begin either in response to a predetermined winning event 212 at 30 a terminal (defining the terminal as the "winning" terminal) and/or at a randomly selected (preferably winning) terminal which is actively being played 214 (defining a "winning"

terminal). When the controller detects or declares such an initiating or triggering event 212, 214, the controller 118 selects a first terminal within the group 112a-112j to be the terminal which will initiate the attract display 216. Preferably, the attract display is initiated on a terminal other than the terminal where a prize will be awarded, i.e., other than the "winning" terminal. In one embodiment, the initiating terminal is spaced a predetermined (or randomly selected) number of terminals (in a predetermined or randomly selected direction) from the winning terminal. In another embodiment, the attract display initiating terminal is randomly selected among (preferably non-winning) terminals. The controller 118 then sends signals appropriately to the various terminals 112a-112j instructing terminals, preferably sequentially, provide the attract display on the respective display screens 114a-114j. This procedure is repeated preferably for a predetermined time period, e.g., sufficient to attract the attention of prospective players. At the end of the attract display period, the controller 118 sends a signal to the winning terminal to provide an ending display 222. Preferably, the ending display is particularly interesting such as having additional and/or specially animated graphics or other display, amplified or otherwise distinctive audio output and preferably drawing attention to the fact that the terminal will be awarding a prize. Preferably, the winning terminal then provides the bonus or other prize and the process of the attract display terminates 224.

20 Although the above-described attract display aspect can be used in connection with a plurality of different bonus prizes or other prizes, it is believed particularly advantageous to use gaming terminals which can provide certain non-static or multiple-event bonus features. Figure 3 depicts a gaming terminal of the slot machine type 312 having a plurality of mechanical or simulated reel displays 314abc, a coin or other wager input device 316, a pull handle 318 or other gaming control, a bonus display 322 which can be, e.g., a computer controlled CRT or LCD display, a back-lit display, a mechanical display and the like and a coin tray or other prize output device 324. In the depicted gaming terminal 312, the main game (i.e., the game which is played normally in response to input of a wager by the wagering device 316) is the slot machine game 326. 25 Preferably, the bonus feature is available only after playing one or more rounds of the main game 326, such as in response to one or more particular outputs or gaming

outcomes of the main game 326. Although, for purposes of illustration, the embodiment of Fig. 3 shows potential bonus values appearing on any of the slot machine reels 314abc, it is also possible to provide bonus values on only one of the reels (e.g., to avoid ambiguity that could arise from the appearance of two or more contradictory bonus values along the pay line).

In the depicted embodiment, the bonus feature involves a plurality of sequential or ordered steps or positions on the display 322, beginning at a first position 328a with subsequent ordered stages or positions 328b through 328n leading to a final stage or position 328p. In the depicted embodiment, the final position 328p is associated with a, preferably largest, bonus prize. In the depicted embodiment, some or all of the intermediate stages or positions 328a-328n are associated with intermediate prizes 328d, 328j, 328m, advancement values 328c or retreat values 328e. In the embodiment depicted in Fig. 3, the main game 326c has a plurality of potential game output symbols, at least some of which are associated with bonus advancement values 332a 332b 10 termination or bust values 334, zero or neutral values 336, negative or retreat values 338 and, some of which 342a through 342d may have no bonus value associated therewith.

As depicted in Fig. 4, evaluation of an output of the main game 326 for effect on the bonus feature depends on the appearance of bonus values or symbols in the main game 326. In the embodiment of Fig. 4, when the main game provides a positive value symbol on a pay line 412 (such as having value P), a current position marker on the bonus display 322 (which may be a symbol displayed on the display screen 322, differential illumination of the stages or positions or the like) is advanced P positions along the sequential path from 328a towards 328p. Thus, at the initiation or beginning phase, the marker is positioned at or before the first stage or position 328a. If, for 20 example, the value of P were 3 (332b) the marker would be advanced three positions, e.g., to position 328d. At the end of the advancement, the bonus display is evaluated 416 to determine whether the marker has arrived at the end of the path, i.e., the last stage or position 328p and, if so, the end-of-path bonus (e.g., \$100 in the embodiment depicted in Fig. 3) is paid 418, and the marker retreats to the beginning of the path, i.e., at or 25 before position 328a. If not at the end of the path, the system determines 418 whether the marker has landed on (or, in some embodiments, passed through) an intermediate

bonus symbol (328d, 328j, 328m) in which case the intermediate bonus is paid 419, thus ending the evaluation procedure 424. If the marker did not land on an intermediate bonus symbol, it is determined whether the marker landed on an advance symbol (328c) or a retreat symbol (328e) 426, in which case the marker is advanced or retreated according to the symbol 428 and the new position is evaluated 416, 418. Otherwise, the evaluation procedure ends 424. If the main game 326 results in a "bust" or termination symbol 334 along a pay line 432, the marker retreats to the beginning of the path 434. In one embodiment, when the marker retreats the beginning of the path, either as a result of the bust symbol 434 or because of arrival of the end of the path 418, the path is preferably reconfigured 436, e.g., to change the values or positions of the positive, negative, zero or bust symbols along the path, the number of stages and the like.

As depicted in Fig. 4, if the main game results in a zero value symbol 336 or results in no bonus path symbol 342a-d, 338, there is no change in the path position (i.e., no change in the position of the marker 342a 342b) and the evaluation phase ends 424. If the main game provides 338 a negative value symbol 444 the marker will retreat N positions along the path 446 (i.e. toward the starting position) before the end of the evaluation 424.

Fig. 5 depicts a display 512 in which bonus feature regions or spaces are organized into groups 514a-e (in the depicted embodiment, displayed as rows 516a-516e). Although a number of ways of organizing and/or displaying the groups of spaces or symbols can be used, in the depicted embodiment, the groups are organized in order of decreasing size, forming a triangle or pyramid shape. The various spaces or symbols 518a-518p are associated with one or more values (518b, e, f, i, l, m, p) multipliers (518g) "next row" symbol (518a, 518d, 518h, 518k, 518n) or end or "bust" symbols (518c, 518j). Preferably, the symbols associated with the various spaces are initially concealed from the player and are only revealed after a player selects a space or area (e.g., via a key or keyboard, touch screen or similar selection procedure or device). Preferably, a player can only select from the symbols or spaces in a single group or row 514a-e at any time. In one embodiment, the bonus feature is initiated in response to the appearance of a predefined bonus symbol or game output in the main game. As depicted in Fig. 6, the bonus feature is initiated by setting the current row counter (K) to the lowest value (L),

and setting the total or accumulated bonus (which is preferably displayed 522) to zero 612. The user is then permitted to select one of the items in the first row 614. If the item selected by the player is associated with a bonus value 616, that value is added to the total 618. If the item selected is a multiplier 622, the amount in the total 522 is multiplied by 5 the multiplier 624. If the item selected is an arrow or "next row" symbol 626, the row counter K incremented 628. If, following the selection of the item, it is determined that all items in the end or last row have been selected 632, the bonus round is terminated. Otherwise, the system loops 634 to permit selection of the next item, possibly after 10 waiting for the appearance of another bonus symbol in the main game 636 (e.g., if it is desired to implement the bonus as a persistence feature). If the item selected is an end or bust symbol 642, the system, in the depicted embodiment, awards the accumulated 15 bonus total 522 to the player 644. Preferably, after an end or bust feature (either because of the selection of an end symbol or because all items in the nth row have been selected) the bonus screen or feature is reconfigured 646, e.g., by changing the position, magnitude, nature and/or number of items in the bonus display.

In light of the above-description a number of advantages of the present invention can be seen. The present invention can attract potential players to a gaming terminal among a group of gaming terminals, preferably providing a perception of an increased likelihood of award of a bonus or other prize among the group of gaming terminals, but 20 without the need for increasing the prize or operating costs in the group of terminals. The present invention can provide a bonus feature which includes a sequential series of stages or positions leading to a ultimate bonus without requiring forfeiture of all bonus amounts in the bonus round should the player fail to reach the ultimate bonus position before receiving a non-bonus-symbol result in the main game. In general, the present invention 25 can provide for increased attractiveness and/or entertainment value associated with bonus prizes or other prizes in a gaming system preferably at relatively low cost of design, fabrication, operation and/or maintenance.

A number of variations and modifications of the present invention can be used. It is possible to use some features of the invention without using others. For example, 30 it is possible to use the described attract feature without using the bonus features of Figs. 3-6 and vice versa. Although the invention has been illustrated by way of procedures

including procedures of Figs. 2, 4, and 6, some or all aspects of the invention can be provided in other fashions including by implementing procedures having more or fewer steps and/or steps performed in a different order than that depicted. Although in the embodiment of Fig. 3, the symbols or values on the path are displayed, it is also possible to provide a configuration in which some or all symbols are hidden unless and until the marker lands on such symbols or spaces. Although the embodiment of Fig. 3 depicts a single linear path, it is also possible to provide configurations in which there may be a forked or branched path with symbols selecting or toggling the choice between left and right branches and the like. In one embodiment, in the configuration of Fig. 3, intermediate bonus values are paid (or vested) when the marker lands on (or passes) intermediate bonus values. In other embodiments, intermediate values are not paid or vested unless the marker reaches the end of the path, or reaches a pay symbol or similar symbol (not shown). Thus, in some embodiments, upon landing on a "bust" symbol, players will still receive intermediate bonus values while in other embodiments, landing on a "bust" symbol results in forfeiture of intermediate bonus values. In the embodiment depicted in Figs. 3 and 4, the bonus feature has a persistence aspect whereby movement along the bonus path is interspersed with rounds of the main game so that two or more rounds of the main game may be played between the time that the bonus feature is initiated and the time that it is terminated (e.g., as a result of a bust or reaching the end of the path). However, it is also possible to configure the embodiment of Figs. 3 and 4 in a non-persistence fashion such that once the main game provides a output resulting in initiation of the bonus feature, the bonus feature will continue, without further play of the main game, until the bonus feature is terminated, whereupon the play of the main game can resume, if desired. Similarly, although the embodiment depicted in Figs. 5 and 6 provides a substantially non-persistent game wherein, once the bonus feature is initiated, the bonus feature continues until termination (either from a bust symbol or from reaching the last symbol in the last row) before play of the main game is resumed, it is also possible to configure an embodiment generally in accord with Figs. 5 and 6 but in which rounds of the main game are interspersed with the bonus feature (without the need to terminate the bonus feature through a "bust" symbol or reaching the last symbol in the last row) before resuming main game play. Coordinated display can be provided using

any of a number of different displays, including a display used for playing a primary game (e.g. the main video display of a video gaming device), a bonus display device, and/or a separate display used only for co-ordinated and/or attract display. Using a display device which is also used for other gaming operations can reduce cost and or hardware requirements for implementing embodiments of the present invention. Co-ordination among several gaming terminals can include co-ordination of items in addition to (or in place of) coordination of video screen displays, including, e.g. co-ordination of lights, co-ordination of bells or other audio items, and the like. A coordinated display can be provided in connection with any of a plurality of different types of games, including slot machine games, electronic poker or other card games, keno games, or groups of terminals which play a variety of different games (in the same co-ordinated display group).

The present invention, in various embodiments, includes components, methods, processes, systems and/or apparatus substantially as depicted and described herein, including various embodiments, subcombinations, and subsets thereof. Those of skill in the art will understand how to make and use the present invention after understanding the present disclosure. The present invention, in various embodiments, includes providing devices and processes in the absence of items not depicted and/or described herein or in various embodiments hereof, including in the absence of such items as may have been used in previous devices or processes, e.g. for improving performance, achieving ease and/or reducing cost of implementation. The present invention includes items which are novel, and terminology adapted from previous and/or analogous technologies, for convenience in describing novel items or processes, do not necessarily retain all aspects of conventional usage of such terminology.

The foregoing discussion of the invention has been presented for purposes of illustration and description. The foregoing is not intended to limit the invention to the form or forms disclosed herein. Although the description of the invention has included description of one or more embodiments and certain variations and modifications, other variations and modifications are within the scope of the invention, e.g. as may be within the skill and knowledge of those in the art, after understanding the present disclosure. It is intended to obtain rights which include alternative embodiments to the extent

permitted, including alternate, interchangeable and/or equivalent structures, functions, ranges or steps to those claimed, whether or not such alternate, interchangeable and/or equivalent structures, functions, ranges or steps are disclosed herein, and without intending to publicly dedicate any patentable subject matter.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for use with gaming terminals comprising:
 - 5 selecting a first gaming terminal among a first group of gaming terminals, wherein, at the time of said selecting, it has already been determined that said first gaming terminal will output a first prize, each gaming terminal including a display device for providing normal displays during normal game play at said gaming terminals;
 - 10 providing second displays on each gaming terminal of said first group of gaming terminals, said second displays being different from said normal displays, said second displays being temporally coordinated with one another whereby said first group of gaming terminals are provided with an appearance of being electronically coupled, one to another;
 - 15 terminating said second displays and providing said normal displays; and outputting said first prize from said first gaming terminal.
2. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein said second displays are temporally coordinated by occurring sequentially on adjacent gaming terminals of said group of gaming terminals.
3. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein said second displays are temporally coordinated by occurring substantially simultaneously on a subset of said group of terminals.
- 20 4. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein said step of providing said second displays occurs without first providing an indication to a player, on said first gaming terminal, that said first gaming terminal will output said first prize.
5. A method, as claimed in claim 1 wherein at least one of said gaming terminals in said group includes an electronic controller for controlling said displays so as to provide temporal coordination.
- 25 6. A method, as claimed in claim 5, wherein a second of said gaming terminals commences operation for controlling said displays in response to a failure of said one of said gaming terminals.
7. A method, as claimed in claim 5, wherein said first gaming terminal is selected as said one of said gaming terminals.

8. A method for use in an electronic gaming terminal, which provides a player with an opportunity to play a round of a main game in response to at least a first wager amount, for providing a bonus game, different from said main game, comprising:

(a) displaying, on a bonus display device, a plurality of bonus game positions defining at least a first path of sequential ones of said bonus game positions, wherein, at any given time during bonus play, one of said bonus game positions is visually indicated as being a current position, said first path including a start position and an end position, at least one position other than said end position being associated with a first bonus prize;

5 (b) controlling said bonus display device to indicate said start position as said current position;

(c) moving said current position a number of positions in a direction along said first path to a new current position, wherein said number of positions and said direction are indicated by one of a main game outcome and indicia on one of said bonus game positions;

10 (d) incrementing a bonus prize counter by any prize amount associated with said new current position;

(e) repeating steps (c) and (d) until said current position is said end position or said current position is associated with a bust indicator; and

15 (f) moving said current position to said start position and paying an amount indicated by said bonus prize counter when said current position is said end position or said current position is associated with a bust indicator.

9. A method, as claimed in claim 8, wherein said end position is associated with a largest bonus prize.

10. A method, as claimed in claim 8 further comprising reconfiguring said first path after step (f).

11. A method, as claimed in claim 10 wherein said reconfiguring includes at least one step selected from the group consisting of:

changing prize values associated with path positions;

changing values of positive, negative or zero symbols;

30 changing the position of positive, negative zero or bust symbols; or

changing the number of positions in the path.

12. A gaming apparatus which provides a player with an opportunity to play a round of a main game in response to at least a first wager amount, for providing a bonus game, different from said main game, comprising:

5 a gaming terminal having a computer and at least a first controllable display, the computer being programmed to:

10 (a) display on a bonus display device, a plurality of bonus game positions defining at least a first path of sequential ones of said bonus game positions, wherein, at any given time during bonus play, one of said bonus game positions is visually indicated as being a current position, said first path including a start position and an end position, at least one position other than said end position being associated with a first bonus prize;

15 (b) control said bonus display device to indicate said start position as said current position;

20 (c) move said current position a number of positions in a direction along said first path to a new current position, wherein said number of positions and said direction are indicated by one of a main game outcome and indicia on one of said bonus game positions;

25 (d) increment a bonus prize counter by any prize amount associated with said new current position;

(e) repeat items (c) and (d) until said current position is said end position or said current position is associated with a bust indicator; and

25 (f) move said current position to said start position and paying an amount indicated by said bonus prize counter when said current position is said end position or said current position is associated with a bust indicator.

13. Apparatus which provides a player with an opportunity to play a round of a main game in response to at least a first wager amount, for providing a bonus game, different from said main game, comprising:

30 (a) means for displaying, on a bonus display device, a plurality of bonus game positions defining at least a first path of sequential ones of said bonus game positions,

wherein, at any given time during bonus play, one of said bonus game positions is visually indicated as being a current position, said first path including a start position and an end position, at least one position other than said end position being associated with a first bonus prize;

5 (b) means for indicating, on said bonus display, said start position as said current position;

10 (c) means for moving said current position a number of positions in a direction along said first path to a new current position, wherein said number of positions and said direction are indicated by one of a main game outcome and indicia on one of said bonus game positions;

(d) means for incrementing a bonus prize counter by any prize amount associated with said new current position;

(e) means for repeating operation of means (c) and (d) until said current position is said end position or said current position is associated with a bust indicator; and

15 (f) means for moving said current position to said start position and paying an amount indicated by said bonus prize counter when said current position is said end position or said current position is associated with a bust indicator.

14. A method for use in an electronic gaming terminal, which provides a player with an opportunity to play a round of a main game in response to at least a first wager amount, for providing a bonus game, different from said main game, comprising:

20 (a) displaying, on a bonus display device, a plurality of bonus game positions defining a sequential plurality of groups of said bonus game positions, wherein, at any given time during bonus play, one of said bonus game positions is visually indicated as being a current position, said first path including a start group and an end group, at least one position in each group other than said end group being associated with a next group indicator, at least one of said bonus game positions being associated with at least a first bonus prize, at least one of said bonus game positions being associated with a bust indicator;

25 (b) storing an indication of said start group as being a current group;

30 (c) selecting, by said player, a bonus position within said current group to define a selected position;

(d) revealing any indicator associated with said selected position to define a revealed indicator;

(e) awarding accumulated bonus prizes and reconfiguring said bonus display when said revealed indicator is a bust indicator;

5 (f) awarding accumulated bonus prizes and reconfiguring said bonus display when said revealed indicator is the last indicator in said end group;

(g) incrementing a bonus prize counter by any prize amount associated with said revealed indicator

10 (h) moving said current group to an adjacent group when said revealed indicator is a next group indicator and

(i) repeating steps (c) through (h) until said revealed indicator is a bust indicator or the last indicator in said end group.

15 15. A method as claimed in claim 14 wherein said display comprises a touchscreen display and wherein said step of selecting comprises touching an area of said touchscreen which displays a bonus position.

16. A method as claimed in claim 14 wherein said groups are displayed in order of group size to provide a generally triangular arrangement of positions.

20 17. A method, as claimed in claim 14, wherein at least one bonus position is associated with a multiplier value and further comprising multiplying said bonus prize counter value by said multiplier value in response to selecting said bonus position associated with said multiplier value.

18. A method as claimed in claim 14 wherein said player can only select from among one of said groups at any time.

25 19. A method as claimed in claim 14 wherein concealing at least some of said indicators prior to selecting a bonus position.

20 20. A method as claimed in claim 14 wherein said reconfiguring is selected from the group consisting of:

changing a prize value associated with at least one position;

changing the number of positions in at least one group; and

30 changing the location of at least one bonus game position.

21. Apparatus which provides a player with an opportunity to play a round of a main game in response to at least a first wager amount, for providing a bonus game, different from said main game, comprising:

5 a gaming terminal including at least a first display device and a programmable computer, said computer being programmed to:

10 (a) display, on a bonus display device, a plurality of bonus game positions defining a sequential plurality of groups of said bonus game positions, wherein, at any given time during bonus play, one of said bonus game positions is visually indicated as being a current position, said first path including a start group and an end group, at least one position in each group other than said end group being associated with a next group indicator, at least one of said bonus game positions being associated with at least a first bonus prize, at least one of said bonus game positions being associated with a bust indicator;

15 (b) store an indication of said start group as being a current group;

(c) receive a selection, by said player, of a bonus position within said current group to define a selected position;

(d) reveal any indicator associated with said selected position to define a revealed indicator;

20 (e) award accumulated bonus prizes and reconfigure said bonus display when said revealed indicator is a bust indicator;

(f) award accumulated bonus prizes and reconfigure said bonus display when said revealed indicator is the last indicator in said end group;

(g) increment a bonus prize counter by any prize amount associated with said revealed indicator

25 (h) move said current group to an adjacent group when said revealed indicator is a next group indicator and

(i) repeat items (c) through (h) until said revealed indicator is a bust indicator or the last indicator in said end group.

22. Apparatus for use in an electronic gaming terminal, which provides a player with an opportunity to play a round of a main game in response to at least a first wager amount, for providing a bonus game, different from said main game, comprising:

5 (a) means for displaying, on a bonus display device, a plurality of bonus game positions defining a sequential plurality of groups of said bonus game positions, wherein, at any given time during bonus play, one of said bonus game positions is visually indicated as being a current position, said first path including a start group and an end group, at least one position in each group other than said end group being associated with a next group indicator, at least one of said bonus game positions being associated with at least a first bonus prize, at least one of said bonus game positions being associated with 10 a bust indicator;

(b) means for storing an indication of said start group as being a current group;

(c) means for permitting selecting, by said player, a bonus position within said current group to define a selected position;

15 (d) means for revealing any indicator associated with said selected position to
define a revealed indicator;

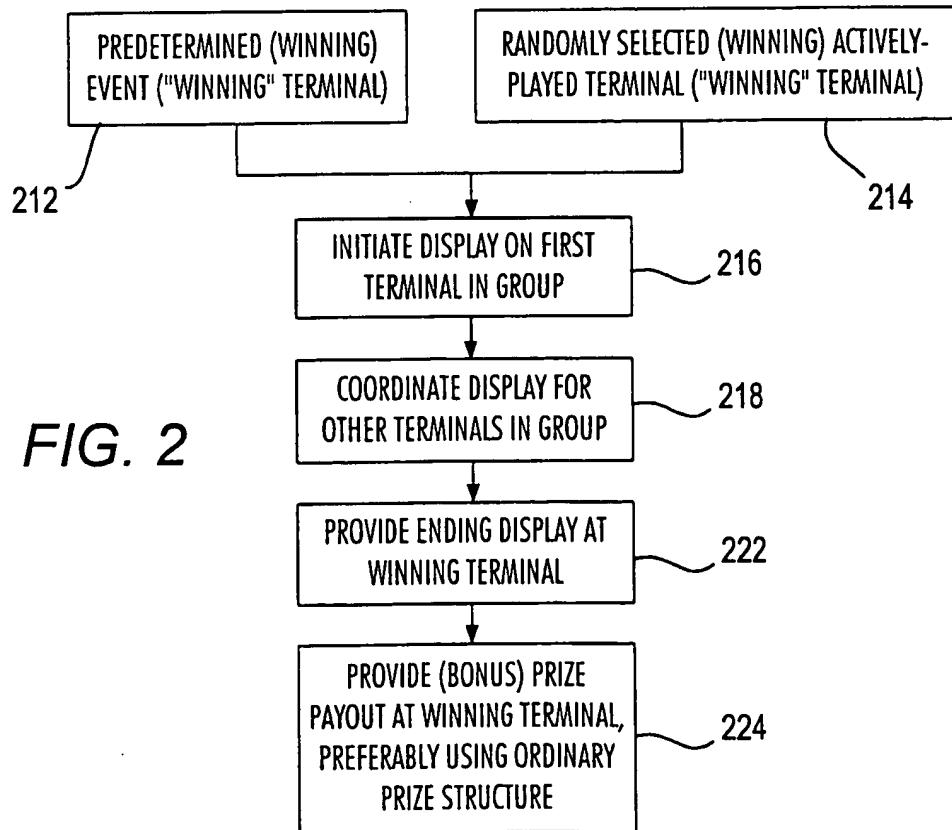
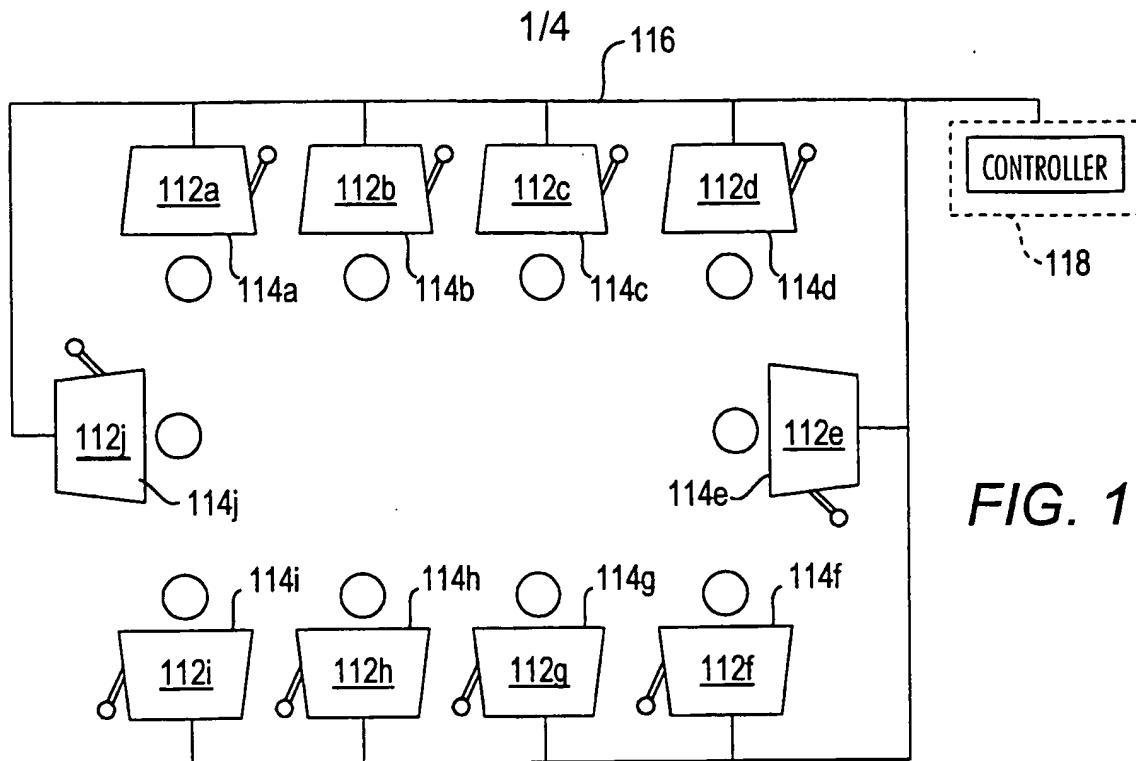
(e) means for awarding accumulated bonus prizes and reconfiguring said bonus display when said revealed indicator is a bust indicator;

(f) means for awarding accumulated bonus prizes and reconfiguring said bonus display when said revealed indicator is the last indicator in said end group;

(g) means for incrementing a bonus prize counter by any prize amount associated with said revealed indicator

(h) means for moving said current group to an adjacent group when said revealed indicator is a next group indicator and

25 (i) means for repeating steps (c) through (h) until said revealed indicator is a bust indicator or the last indicator in said end group.



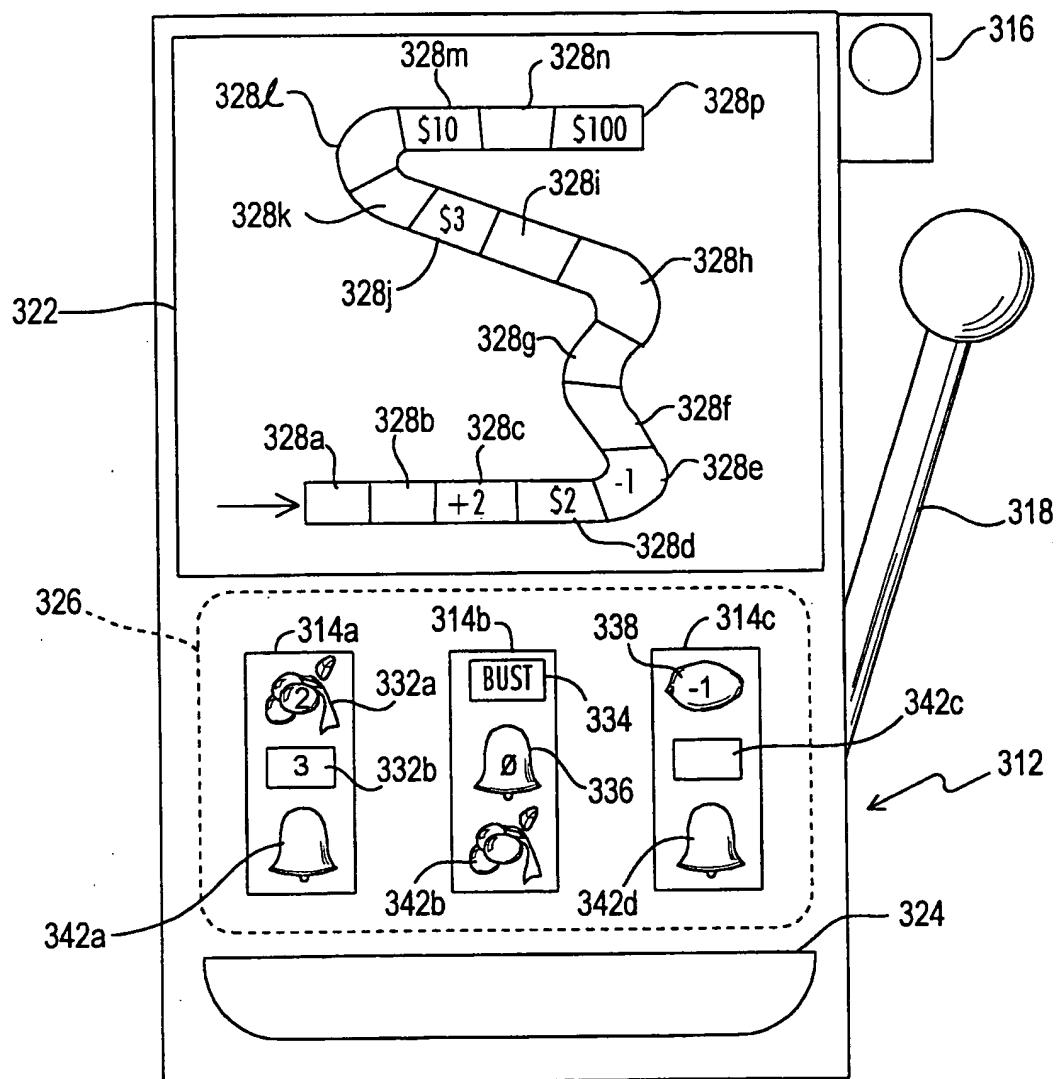


FIG. 3

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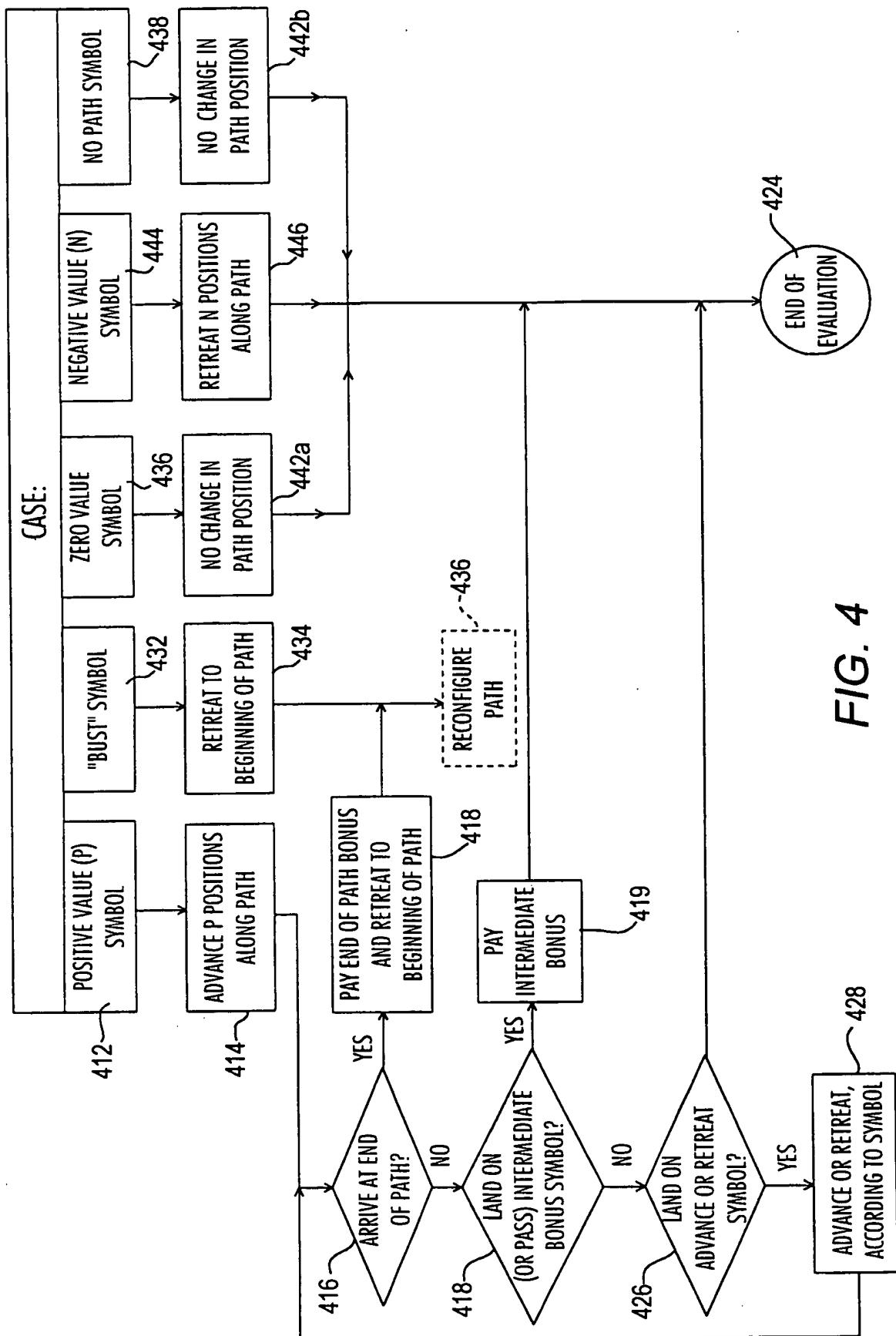


FIG. 4

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FIG. 5

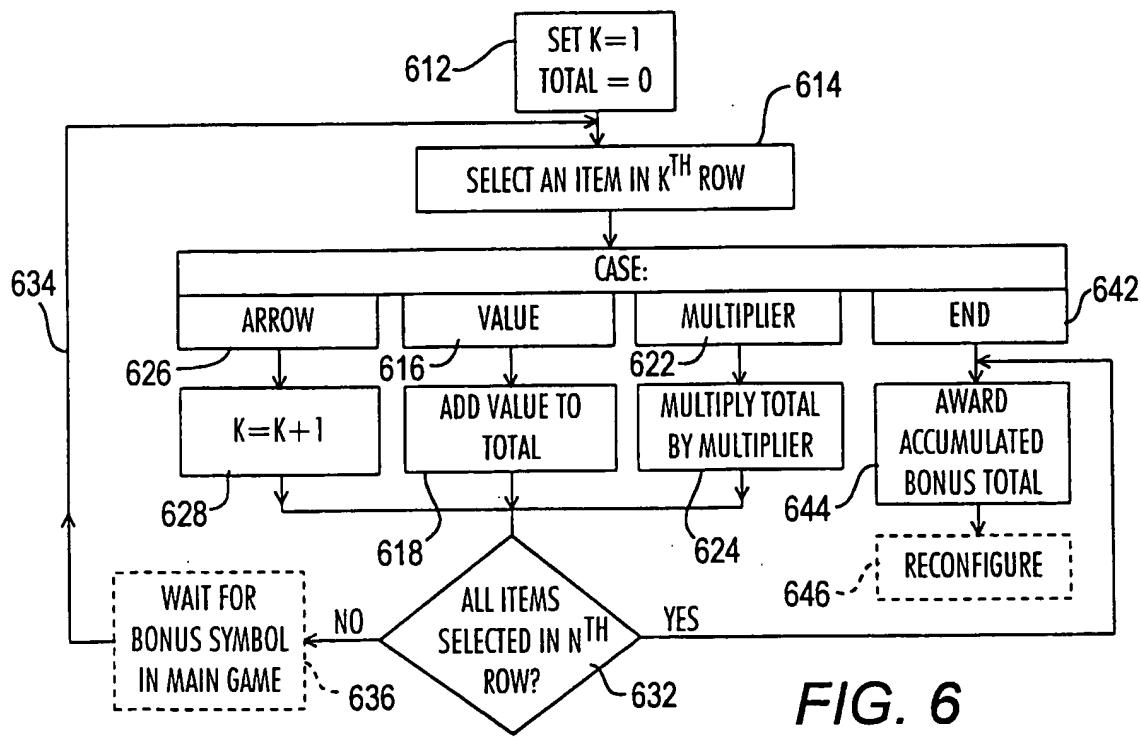
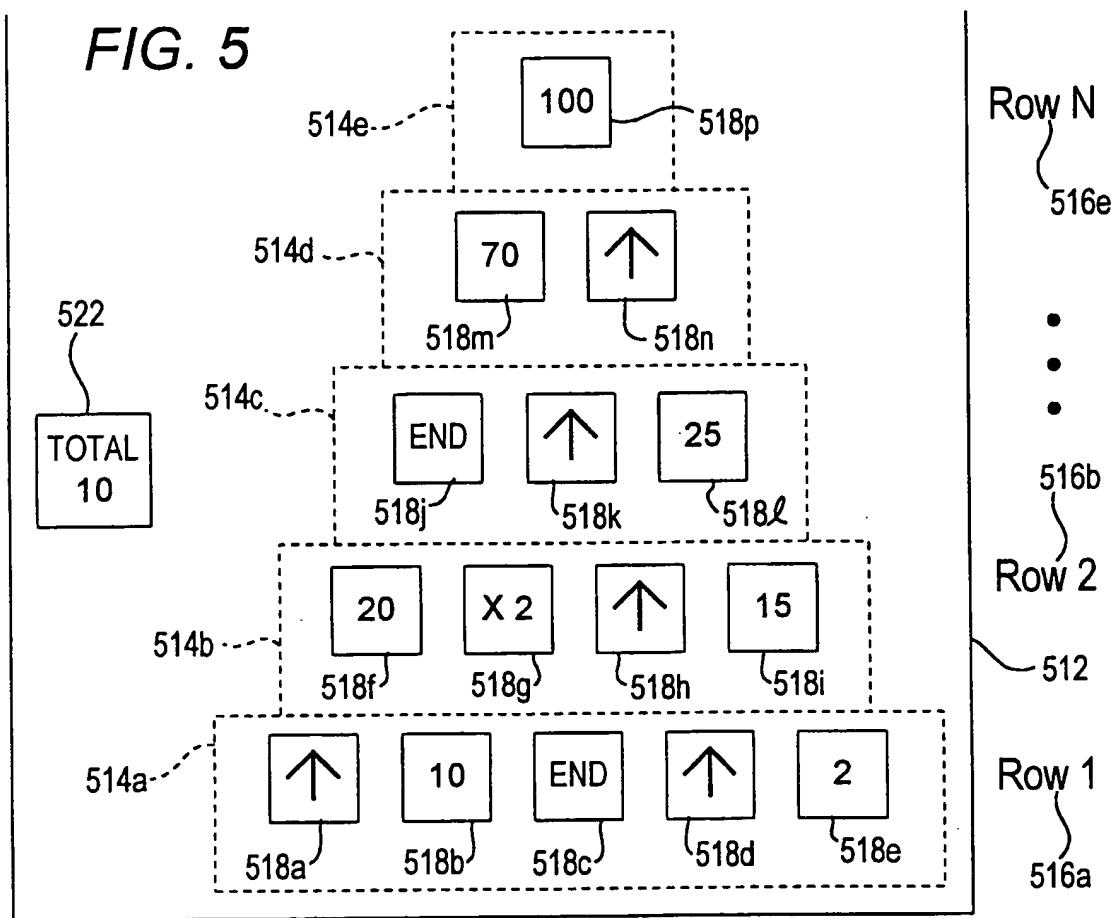


FIG. 6

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US00/25069

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(7) : A63F 9/24

US CL : 463/20

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

U.S. : 463/16-20, 42

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

EAST,

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

| Category* | Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages | Relevant to claim No. |
|-----------|--|-----------------------|
| Y | US 5,472,195A (TAKEMOTO et al) 05 December 1995, see entire document | 1-21 |
| Y | US 5,876,284A (ACRES et al) 02 March 1999, see entire document | 1-21 |
| Y | US 5,547,192 A (ISHIBASHI) 20 August 1996, see entire document | 1-21 |
| Y | US 5,564,700 A (CELONA) 15 October 1996, see entire document | 1-21 |
| Y,P | US 6,110,043 A (OLSEN) 29 August 2000, see entire document | 1-21 |
| Y,P | US 6,089,976 A (SCHNEIDER et al) 18 July 2000, see entire document | 1-21 |

 Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. See patent family annex.

| | | |
|---|-----|--|
| * Special categories of cited documents: | "T" | later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention |
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| "P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed | | |

Date of the actual completion of the international search

06 DECEMBER 2000

Date of mailing of the international search report

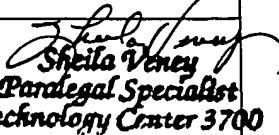
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 Sheila Veney
 Paralegal Specialist
 Technology Center 3700

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

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| International application No. PCT/US00/25069 |
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| C (Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT | | |
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| Category* | Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages | Relevant to claim No. |
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| Y | GB 2,147,442 A (PARKER et al) 09 May 1985, see entire document | 1-21 |